

## **AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES**

### **March 4, 2010**

**Members Present:** Daniel Clapp, Joan Golowich, Joel Gordon, Doris Holden, Rosemary Kofler, Mary Jane Laus, Barbara Sutherland, Juana Trujillo

**Absent:** Kathy Koplow

**Select Board Liaison:** Gerry Weiss

**Staff Present:** Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Priscilla Robbins (Senior Aide Program)

**Guests:** Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Stephanie O'Keefe (Select Board Chair), Barbara Slovin (President of the Friends of the Amherst SC); Elizabeth Kelly (Member of the Friends of the ASC) Joan Logan, Judith Fish, Helen Reynolds, Louise D'Alessandro, Elana Victor, Parvin Niroomand, Richard Kofler, Ida Kain, Lillian Scott, Joelle Adlerblum, Bea Dragon, Bob Johnston, Elaine Fligman, Warren Bechtold, Dona Motts, Maria Zraunig, Elaine State. Scott Merzbach (Gazette Reporter)

**Welcome:** Dan Clapp, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:33 AM.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting:** The minutes of the February 4, 2010 meeting were approved and accepted.

#### **Friends' Treasurer Report:**

**Doris** provided a handout showing \$16,126.03 in the checking account and \$68,429.67 in the investment account.

**Karen** reported contributions to the Friends for FY10 as \$9,523, of which \$6,885 has been since December.

#### **Conversation with Larry:**

Conversations continue with department heads at Bangs as to how Bangs can be used more efficiently and effectively. The three departments (Senior Center, Health Department and Leisure Services) need to consider how they might work more effectively and what opportunities might exist for coalescing various aspects of those departments in order to reduce the cost of operation and provide improvements of service. All three department heads (Nancy Pagano, Julie Federman and Linda Chalfant) acknowledge that it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide the same level of quality service due to the budgetary challenges and stricture on financing. Several concepts have been explored. As yet, no plans have been approved, endorsed or authorized. One of the ideas would be to consolidate administrative services amongst all three departments. For example, scheduling of programs that happens intensively at the SC and LSSE could be changed to just one port of entry; scheduling of space and how we notify the public about program location could be changed from paper to computer; improving building signage could be improved and the use of electronic sign boards similar to those at Town Hall could be added. Larry hopes the COA will endorse moving forward with this process aggressively and will endorse the investigation of changes. Larry's commitment to the COA and seniors of the community is that he will be open and communicative throughout the process and take into consideration important concerns.

Larry invited questions.

**Dan** said the purpose of the COA is to advocate, advise and assist. He suggested forming a COA sub-committee to offer formal assistance to Nancy in the on-going adjustments that need to be made.

**What is the time frame?** Larry said there is no schedule. The model of reorganization of Planning, Conservation, Inspections and Community Development is a fine example. Adjustments were made as we went along. It has resulted in a more efficient, effective department. It was the only department that did not receive budget cuts. They are very happy about how they have been able to improve their service to the public.

**What is the status of the CDH offer and use of space at Bangs?** Larry is not sure of the particulars. He originally approached CDH about the possibility of any services and equipment that could be made available to benefit seniors in Town. **Nancy** said that CDH has budgeted \$20,000 as a

gift to the Town of Amherst to buy fitness equipment if we can provide adequate supervision to those who use the equipment to ensure safety. If there is space, CDH would also like to have an office at Bangs to provide for PT and OT. The two projects are not connected.

Larry spoke about the use of space at Bangs. Community Development has moved out of Bangs. The Health Department moved down one floor. The Veterans office has been downsized. The Social Justice program has moved out of Bangs. We are trying to free up space and consolidate programs around central suites so there are not so many stand-alone little programs. By merging them together they have more administrative capacity. Freeing up space allows us to entertain the possibility of programs such as the CDH offer. There is talk about leasing the entire top floor for all human service agencies to consolidate their administrative profile and provide more service. It makes sense to have the Health Department, the Senior Center and LSSE on one floor to allow us to have one copying suite, one receptionist suite, and one administrative suite. Bring all the programs down to the lower floor. The space would be open for nothing but programs and the space could be properly outfitted for those programs with proper computer files, matting, chairs, etc. The department heads will look at all of that and develop a recommendation.

**Barbara Slovin**, as a former SC employee, expressed concern that the SC remain a place where elders will want to come to meet others and know that they can get some of their needs met in a place they can feel comfortable.

Larry acknowledged that as a legitimate concern. It is important that the SC should be a place for socialization and personal interaction. There is no intent to limit that capacity. In fact, we will look for ways to expand it. Perhaps we will end up with no changes whatsoever, but we need to look at the possibilities for opportunities.

**Is there a budget for the expenditures involved in the possible changes? What funds are available?** If the changes get approved and they involve architectural and structural changes we will see what we need and if we can locate the funds. With Planning, Conservation, Inspections and Community Development funds were set aside from salaries they had saved from a particular year – about \$65,000. The Town Manager has the authority and ability to organize and make choices within the Town budget. The money would not come from salaries in the Senior Center budget. Although \$10,000 of Karen's salary is still one of the proposed cuts, if the override passes that cut will be restored.

**Nancy asked** if the reconfiguration process and decision making around that could include a public hearing before the final decision is made, following the department heads' recommendations. Larry said that is up to the COA or Select Board to invite public comment. He would welcome that. Our goal is to make us a better organization and be in a position where we can provide and enhance our services going forward.

**Stephanie O'Keefe**, Chair of the Select Board, put things in a broader context. The budget situation in the last couple years has been horrific. Each year at Town Meeting when we try to pare back and can only afford to provide the core services in Town, the looming question is 'will this be the year that we have to eliminate the SC or LSSE?' Each year the answer has been "we are not going to do that". The SB gives budget guidelines to the Town Manager. This year they were explicit in saying they did not want to eliminate the profile in senior services or recreation. That means that things had to happen Town-wide. What the Town Manager is doing is consistent with the SB guidelines. We cannot afford to do business as usual any longer. We have to find efficiencies in what we are doing in order to be able to preserve what we value. She commended Larry Shaffer for prioritizing the SC by keeping budget cuts as minimal as possible.

**Joelle Aderblum** expressed concern that senior activities would be relegated to the lower floor where space is confined and lighting is poor. Seniors need to feel they are coming to an attractive, spacious place. She would like to see offices on the lower floor where paper work is done and people are more stationary and senior activities on upper floors.

Larry expressed appreciation for being at the meeting. He is committed to working with the COA to get us successfully through this process.

## NEW BUSINESS

### **Cooley Dickinson Hospital offer:**

**Nancy** repeated the above statements. Our major obligation is safety. Before CDH will give us fitness equipment or before we accept it, the prerequisite is that we have proper training, proper use and proper supervision for using the equipment.

### **Planning of Volunteer Awards Social/Eveline Sears Senior Activist Awards Ideas:**

**Nancy** encouraged COA members to help plan the event in June. A speaker is needed. Nancy also welcomes ideas for the award. One idea is Alva Roy who for many years led the Audio Book Club.

### **COA Sub-Committee:**

**Dan** asked for members to form a sub-committee to assist Nancy through the change process that is taking place at Bangs. Joel, Joan, Dan and Rosemary will be on the sub-committee.

## SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

### **Pasta Dinner March 6/First Annual Amherst Follies:**

**Barbara Slovin** reported on the April 25 fundraiser – a professional entertainment show for all ages - \$10 for Adults and \$7 for Children. This will become an annual event. The costs of the production will hopefully be covered mainly by the March 6 Pasta Dinner & Show. Amherst College is paying Pasta E Basta to cover the cost of the Pasta Dinner.

Each COA member is asked to try to sell 20 tickets to the First Annual Amherst Follies on April 25.

### **Ad Hoc Survey Committee:**

**Joel** reported. Randall received an additional 16 questionnaires bringing the total to 740 out of 1800 sent. He hopes to have a preliminary revised report available before March 23.

### **Senior Health Advisory Group (SHAG):**

**Dan** reported. Transportation for seniors was a topic for concern at this morning's meeting. The State now requires that seniors over 75 get a driving test. Continuity of care is an on-going topic. That includes the 'medical home' in which all care and specialties are under the supervision of one 'medical home'. There will be a presentation on April 8 at Bangs on self-management of one's on-going health care. An up-to-date medication list should be carried by seniors at all times. It is part of the *File of Life* packet. Lisa White, Senior Health Services RN, will assist people with the medication list.

### **Highland Valley Elder Services:**

**Barbara** reported. There are 28 Towns under the umbrella of HVES. The presentation this month was by Betsy Corner about Family Mediation. The agency also provides training sessions for potential mediators.

### **Golden Cane:**

**Nancy** announced that Loretta Cavanaugh, former holder of the Golden Cane, has died. Nancy and the Town Clerk have identified one candidate as the oldest person in Amherst. Nancy asked for a volunteer to interview that person to see if she meets the requirements of having lived in Amherst for 10 years and is willing to accept the cane.

## STAFF REPORTS

### **S.C. Budget Discussion:**

**Nancy** and Maura made their presentation to the Finance Committee this week. The members were not fully aware of the extent of services provided to elders in Amherst. People in the community also do not know of the great need for those services. Nancy shared copies of her presentation. There were two parts – one on the S.C. budget and one on the growth in senior population. There are 249 Amherst seniors over 90 years old. There are 4,215 elders over 60.

The meeting can be viewed on ACTV.

The Finance Committee voted unanimously to support the override.

**Joel** posed a question about the override – would Karen's salary cut be restored if the override passes since it is the third from the bottom on the restoration list. Is the \$11,000 something the Friends could provide if that cut is not restored?

**Stephanie** explained that the Town, Schools and Library were asked to come up with a prioritized list of restorations. Budget Coordinating Committee would determine what size the override should be based on the prioritization list. If the override passes everything on the restoration list will be restored. The question arose as to whether the COA had a formal position on the override. It was discussed.

Rosemary made a motion:

**The COA supports the override for the Town of Amherst.**

It was seconded and passed unanimously.

**New Counseling Program:**

**Maura** met a part time therapist for River Valley Counseling Center in Chicopee. He will provide therapy for seniors at Bangs for everyday elder issues. He will donate any payments to the Senior Center.

**"Helping Hands" receives small grant from HVES:**

**Maura** received \$600 to help with reimbursement for drivers who transport elders to appointments. A Helping Hands Program to assist elders by picking up prescriptions from the pharmacy will also benefit from the grant.

**Stress Reduction Series to Begin:**

**Nancy** announced that an Occupational Therapist would volunteer her time and begin a several week session on stress reduction.

**WMACA (Western Mass Association of Council on Aging):**

**Nancy** said the organization is holding a meeting on April 1, 2010 at 10 AM at the Northampton Senior Center. Do we want to send a representative? It coincides with our Amherst COA meeting.

The COA meeting adjourned at 10:59 AM.

**The next meeting of the COA will be held on April 1, 2010 at 9:30 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary

The approved minutes of the February 4, 2010 meeting were delivered to the Select Board Office to be filed.